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ABSTRACT

The paper presents the community-based satellite system as a residential and program model to effect deinstitutionalization of mentally retarded young adults in urban centers worldwide. The system is reported to consist of a large, central educational facility surrounded by a series of small houses and apartment units (satellites). Benefits of this environment are discussed: small, family-style houses with a concentration of qualified support staff; easy development of continua of instruction between various satellite facilities; opportunity to teach basic skills in environments where they are normally learned; and no necessity for new construction costs. The author suggests that, with adaptations, the satellite model is applicable throughout the world in urban, and possibly rural, environments. (Author/SBH)

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The Satellite System:

A Model for Deinstitutionalization

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ABSTRACT

The community-based satellite system is presented as a residential and program model to effect deinstitutionalization in urban centers worldwide. The system discussed (in California, U.S.A.) consists of a large, central educational facility surrounded by a series of small houses and apartment units ("satellites"). Benefits of this environment are discussed: small, family-style houses with a concentration of qualified support staff; easy development of continua of instruction between various satellite facilities; opportunity to teach basic skills in environments where they are normally learned; and no necessity for new construction costs. The author believes that, with adaptations, the satellite model is applicable throughout the world in urban, and possibly rural, environments.

The Satellite System:
A Model for Deinstitutionalization[1]

by Craig Boyan

The recent trend toward deinstitutionalization is having profound impact on delivery of services to mentally retarded adults (O'Connor, 1976; Scheerenberger, 1976). Current research, however, cautions that simply moving clients from large institutions to community care facilities is not sufficient to improve habilitation programs. Small homes in particular have the potential for isolating clients (Butler and Bjaanes, 1977).

The community-based satellite system is a residential and program model which can be utilized as an effective special education environment in urban settings throughout the world. The satellite system described in this paper has been developed for mentally retarded young adults over the past ten years by a non-profit service provider, Clausen House, near San Francisco, California. The author believes that this model has implications for other disability goups and age levels, and is applicable in urban environments world-wide. (cf. Stevens, 1977)

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[1]Presented at the Council for Exceptional Children First World Congress on Future Special Education, Stirling, Scotland, June-July, 1978.

This satellite system consists of a large central facility utilized for educational programs for sixty-five clients, surrounded by a series of small homes and a group of apartment-living units ("satellites"). The five small homes house six to eleven residents each, and the apartment-living complex houses fifteen additional clients. Altogether eighty persons are served by the system.

This environmental design permits the living units to remain small and home-like. The atmosphere of such a house or apartment unit can be much more conducive to normal social interaction than a depersonalized ward in a larger institution. At the same time, combining these units into a central administrative system, produces specific benefits:

(1) A concentration of professional teaching and support staff are provided which might not be accessible to the residents of a smaller group home. Examples include qualified special education instructors, a registered nurse, a registered dietician, social workers (to provide individual counselling and liaison with parents and other professionals), sufficient maintenance services, and a central financial administration.

It is of course true that some of these services may be available to individual clients of small, separated group homes through large social service agencies (in California, for example, the Regional Center system). Experience has

shown, however, that the caseloads of some professionals in these agencies are so great that direct services may be delivered at less than optimum level. The satellite system provides a concentration of professional staff who are in day-to-day contact with the clients they serve. The benefits of such services cannot be overestimated.

(2) Clients of the satellite system have a much larger group of other clients with whom to interact. More advanced clients, for example, have participated as teachers' aides with more severely involved clients. Visits or dinner-parties between houses during evenings or on weekends are other examples of such interaction. Although interaction with "normal" persons must be encouraged to promote normalization, it is also beneficial for clients to have a wide variety of possibilities for social interaction and stimulation within the service-delivery system itself.

(3) A graduated continuum of instruction, leading from dependence to full independence, can be developed between different levels of training. Steps in this direction have been taken in the model system under discussion. For example, one house functions as the "launching pad" for the apartment-living units. Clients successfully working in the pre-apartment program can move from instruction at this house to more advanced, independent instruction in the apartment complex. A set of competencies found necessary for moving into urban apartment

living is currently being developed.

Similarly, another home in the satellite system is a specialized environment for persons who are both mentally retarded and emotionally disturbed. Such clients are integrated with other, less disturbed persons in educational programs at the central program facility. With further progress, a client in this special project may move into another home in the system where the residents function on a higher, less disturbed level of socialization. By expanding on such examples as these, a satellite system can develop a graduated continuum of services leading toward full independence, with ease of movement from one living pattern to another.

(4) A fourth benefit of the satellite system derives from making use of the total community environment to teach skills where they are normally learned. Thus, a balanced and integrated developmental program can be maintained utilizing:

(a) the home (of 6-11 persons) as a setting for teaching skills such as grooming and hygiene, care of clothing, laundering, health and safety, nutrition and cooking, use of the telephone, home management and upkeep, and other skills normally learned in the home.

(b) The educational center is used as a locale for instruction in physical training and sensory-motor integration, communication skills and speech, reading, writing, mathematics and time-telling, and similar skills.

(c) The community itself is seen as a "learning laboratory" for transportation and mobility skills, shopping and the practical use of money, and awareness and utilization of community resources.

(d) Other curriculum areas, such as skills of socialization and leisure-time skills, can be taught in all of these environments, just as they are normally learned in our society. Thus, the satellite system, utilizing the home, the educational center, and the community itself, provides a comprehensive basis for post-secondary, community-based "colleges for life skills."

It should be noted, in addition, that no new construction is needed to provide these services. In a world hard-pressed by shortages of raw materials, the satellite model makes use of existing housing patterns. No new construction, and a minimum of special adaptations, are needed (cf. Wolfensberger 1972).

The growth of the satellite system under discussion has led to several young adults moving out of group homes and into semi-independent apartment units. Clients have also shown statistically significant gains in achievement in reading and arithmetic skills. (Boyan, 1977)

In addition to these features, the satellite system also provides challenges both to vocational training programs and to secondary programs for young adults with special needs.

(1) Vocational Programs: It is being increasingly recognized that training in vocational skills alone is not sufficient for success in the job-market. Other areas, including fundamental academics and independent living skills, are necessary (Brolin, 1977). The community-integrated satellite system provides one model for enhancing growth in these pre-vocational areas. Vocational training efforts must recognize that no matter how "normal" a person's job is, his entire life will not be considered "normal" if he must return to an institution or similar facility when the working day is over. The satellite system provides a means for achieving full independence in one's place of residence, a task at least as challenging and complex as achieving full independence in one's place of work (Boyan, 1978).

(2) If the satellite environment can enhance adult services, it is reasonable to believe that it can also enhance services at the secondary level, or at even earlier levels of education. With only minor physical adaptations, already-existing houses or apartment-units could function as "satellites" to high-school programs, offering varied experiences of shopping, cooking, home management, and community living, thus preparing young adults with special needs to move out on their own after high school. Such secondary satellite systems, functioning as "life-training" programs, would complement "work-training" programs, and help children, parents, and professionals focus on the question, "Where will this student live after high school - what environment will fit him or her best?"

Summary and Future Projections

As deinstitutionalization gains momentum worldwide, new models of educational environments will be needed. The community-based satellite system provides one such direction for the future of special education in urban settings. It provides a homelike educational environment which avoids the depersonalization of a large institution, yet allows an enrichment of services and social contacts not always possible in a small and potentially isolated group home.

There is good reason to believe that the model presented here could be successfully adapted to urban settings throughout the world. The fundamental concepts of the model (teaching skills in the settings where they are normaly learned; and small, home-like environments) are adaptable to many diverse cultural settings. It is also possible that, with appropriate alterations, this model could function in rural settings and become useful in many developing nations.

Future developments of the satellite system point in two distinct directions. First, the options available to graduates of the apartment-living complex may become better defined. For example, separate apartment units, scattered throughout the urban center and only minimally tied to the central system, may be a necessary "last step" in approaching total independence. Second, the number of clients involved in service-oriented work-training in the community can be increased. This would expand the number of adult clients already working as volunteers in an elementary school and a hospital setting, and further integrate clients of the satellite system into the larger community.

A dynamic and actively functioning satellite system should be seen as an asset to the overall growth of the clients and of the greater community itself. Such a system can provide the following benefits:

(1) Small, family-style homes (6-11 persons) plus a concentration of qualified professional teaching and support services.

(2) A larger and more diversified group of clients for social interaction.

(3) Easy development of continua of instruction, and ease of movement between facilities as educational needs dictate (from group home to apartment, for example).

(4) Opportunity to teach fundamental skills of daily living in the environments in which they are normally learned: i.e., home, educational center, and in the community itself.

(5) Minimum costs: No necessity for new construction, a critical feature as the costs of housing and materials continue to soar, and especially in developing nations.

The satellite system also offers two challenges to traditional special education programming:

(1) Independent living skills, easily taught within the satellite system, should be incorporated as a fundamental part of any career development or vocational training program.

(2) Community-based satellite systems can and should be utilized in secondary (or earlier) special education programming. The sphere of independent living must be approached with as many resources of modern educational technology as the sphere of independent working. In this way, future special education programs will produce students capable of balanced, self-sufficient lives as productive citizens.

The satellite system has in all these areas international implications for special educators, especially in urban centers. It provides a model capable of meeting the challenges of deinstitutionalization in a complex world, and of assuring better growth for young adults and others with exceptional needs.

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